

Claims

1. A supply chain management method implemented by a processor, a storage device, a communications interface, and user terminals or computers, the method comprising the steps of:
  - (a) generating a unique reference for a new product;
  - (b) generating a transaction record for each operation performed with the product for a supply chain, each transaction record including the associated unique reference without change;
  - (c) terminating the unique reference when the product reaches the end of the configured supply chain by preventing recordal of further transaction records for it; and
  - (d) if the product is modified in the supply chain, terminating the unique reference by preventing recordal of further transaction records for it, generating a unique reference for the modified product, and performing steps (a) to (c) for the modified product.
2. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the step (d) comprises linking the unique reference for the modified product with that for the source product.
3. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein each unique reference includes a series of components, each chosen according to a particular parameter.
4. A method as claimed in claim 3, wherein the first component is an identifier of the location where the product originated.

5. A method as claimed in claim 4, wherein the method includes a unique identifier for each of a plurality of locations for a plurality of manufacturing or supply organizations.
- 5 6. A method as claimed in claim 3, wherein each component is unique within the preceding component.
7. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein splitting of a collection of items such as splitting of a pallet is treated as modification of the original product.
- 10 8. A method as claimed in claim 7, wherein such modification spawns a plurality of fresh references, each for a sub-division of the original product.
- 15 9. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the method validates generation of a fresh unique reference by comparing measure units of the modified product with those of the source product, and generates an error message if they are different.
- 20 10. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein a transaction type identifier is included with each transaction record.
11. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein a transaction type identifier for the transaction which generates the product is included as a component in the unique reference.
- 25 12. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein each transaction record comprises a unique transaction identifier.

13. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein a transaction record includes a plurality of unique references, each for a product involved in the transaction, such as combining two products in a manufacturing operation.
- 5 14. A method as claimed in claim 3, wherein some locations have an associated unit of measure and an error message is generated if different measure data is received for a location.
- 10 15. A supply chain management system comprising means for performing a method as claimed in claim 1.
16. A computer program product comprising software code for performing a method of claim 1, when executing on a digital computer.